

Foxglove

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Foxglove

by [BeastFeast87](#)

Summary

Something was wrong with Max, that David knew for a fact. Between threatening him with a boxcutter, to cutting animals up in the woods, he knew that there was something awful in Max's mind. He just hoped it wouldn't hurt the boy, or anyone else when Max figured out what it was.

MIND THE TAGS

Chapter 1

Max is ten when he cuts David's hand with a sharpened plastic knife.

David is helping the kids with their suitcases and bags, helping them haul them off the bus. He greets each of them affectionately, giving big smiles and cheerfully speaking about Camp Campbell.

"This place looks like shit".

Turning around, he sees no one. Confused, he looks down and spies a young boy with fluffy dark hair, tan skin, and an expression like a guard dog from hell. "Watch the language there little fella!" he chides instinctively with a welcoming smile.

"Jesus Christ, they can really pick them, huh?" he mumbles. The kid wrinkles his nose and pulls a gloved hand out of his pocket to grip the shoulder strap of his dirty grey backpack. "Fuck off".

His good mood stutters and he feels his heart sink a bit. Kids like this one, rude and with cruel eyes, usually come from crueler families. Ones that think children should not be seen or heard, so they send them to a summer camp. "What's your name, fella?" he asks, still smiling. David has learned that unrelenting kindness is usually the way to break through to children like that.

The kid scowled harder, green eyes glaring hard as steel. "Max," he snaps begrudgingly.

"Nice to meet you, Max! My name is David. I'll be your camp counselor for the summer!" he says with a smile, bending so that he is at eye level.

Max rolls his eyes. "Yeah, I don't actually give a shit. Just tell me where the fuck I'm sleeping and I'll get going".

"Language," David chides again, a gentle reminder, and Max growls in frustration. "We can drop your things off if you like but in a half hour, we're all going to the Activities Field so that we can meet each other. You're all going to be staying with each other all summer, after all!" he says with a genial chuckle.

“Sounds like bullshit,” the brunette says, squinting. “I’ll pass, thanks”.

David brightens. So he did have manners! Sarcasm or not, that must be progress, right? “Oh, come on, Max! It’ll be fun!” he replies, offering a hand kindly. “Here, I’ll help you with your bag, it must be heavy”.

Max’s lips curl immediately at the hand. “Step back, bitch!” he snarls.

David sighs, though his smile remains. “Tch. Come on now, there’s no need for that-”

“I said, step the *fuck* back!” Max yells louder.

“Wha-” He never finishes his sentence because the next moment is sharp and full of pain. David clutches his hand in surprise, blood oozing from a slash in his hand. It’s thin, but it bleeds. David can see that the other hand that had previously been hidden in the child’s hoodie is holding a sharpened, white plastic knife in his gloved hand. Max’s eyes are wide enough he can see the white sclera. “Ouchie,” David says, as though he has stubbed his toe. Inside, he feels his intestines twisting and curling in on themselves. He wants to cry; he has never liked blood.

Max raises an eyebrow, the twisted angry look morphing into a sneer. “Holy shit, are you crying?” Max asks, gleeful. A wide grin breaks his face and he clutches the knife tighter in his hand.

“Max, please give me the knife,” David pleads with a whimper. He wipes his face and accidentally smears blood on his cheek. “Violence will not be tolerated at camp”. He tries to say this sternly but winces when his voice cracks with pain.

“God, you’re pathetic,” Max says. His green eyes sear David. “Here”. Max throws the plastic at the counselor, the knife bouncing off his chest harmlessly. “You better go and clean that,” Max taunts, gloved hands back in his pockets. “It’d suck ass to get an infection”.

David knows immediately that it will be a long summer.

Max is ten when David sees him with a box cutter.

David had begun to recognize very quickly that Max did not like playing with the other children, and chose to heckle himself or his co-counselor Gwen instead. He's not sure why; he's inquired on multiple occasions as to the reasoning, but Max will only shrug or snap at him. He's tried forcing group work, but Max will just sit just outside the group he's in and will simply watch.

Max's eyes are careful like this. Measured and focused. He doesn't say anything, it's the quietest David has ever seen the boy.

Since their first meeting, Max has taken to seeing how far he can push David. With Max, the terror is almost never-ending. He's remarkably good at setting up traps, it turns out. He'd limped for two days after one, in particular, had caught him; a tripwire was mysteriously put outside his cabin and sported a bruise on his cheek after. No one had owned up to it, but he knew it had to be Max. No one else would have done such a thing.

So when he sees Max far away from the group with the silver glint of a boxcutter in his hand, his mind heads to the worst. "Max, you put that down right now!"

Max whips his head around, leering green eyes focused. "Or what?" His gloved hand stops mid-slice and David can finally see that Max is... whittling?

"Are you carving?" he asks, astonished. It's not the sort of hobby he would have thought someone like Max might enjoy. It's slow and laborious, and something David always associated with his late grandfather.

Max looks down. "Don't you have anything better to do?"

David huffs. "Better than making sure my campers stay safe? No, actually, I don't".

To his surprise, Max's lips quirk up into a smirk before settling quickly back into a frown. David sits himself down next to the boy carefully, watching a curled shaving of wood fall from the carving. "That's dangerous Max, you could hurt yourself".

Max snorts and slices another curl of wood off with deft hands. “I know what I’m doing, moron. Why do you think I’m wearing gloves?”

That was a good point, Max always wore thin leather gloves. “You do this a lot then?”

Max sighs. “I know what you’re doing. You can cut it the fuck out”.

David straightens his back and tilts his head in confusion. “What do you think I’m doing, Max? I’m just trying to learn more about you”. He offers his warmest smile.

Max grits his teeth and turns so quickly to David he thinks his head might have snapped. Hard green eyes glare into him. “*No*, you aren’t,” he snarls, lips curling in that same angry expression that he’d seen that first day, and felt his thudding heart rise into his throat. “You’re just trying to get me to open up, because you think I’ve got problems with my foster parents, and that I’m just some *poor kid* who doesn’t know any better. You aren’t doing it for me, you’re doing it because you feel bad”. Each word was spat with the spite of someone who was frustrated beyond anything David had ever seen. “But let me tell you something,” Max hissed, gripping the front of David’s shirt quickly. The sharp edge of the box cutter pressed close to his jaw, brushing against the edge of his neck in a flash. David swallowed and ceased to breathe. “I’m not afraid, I’ve never been *afraid*, and I’m not going to fucking let you act like I’m as pathetic as you are. Got it?”

David whimpered. “P-Please put down the knife, Max. Someone could get hurt”.

Max’s eyes gained a strange glow. It wasn’t physical, but it seemed to come from deep within the green orbs. It made David shiver, it lit a flame in a small part of David’s brain that had mostly died out with human domestication, but it blazed, roared now a warning: *something dangerous is here*.

But that couldn’t be right. Max was just a child.

A child with a box cutter at your throat.

“What do you think you’ll get out of this?” Max hissed quietly. “What do you think you’ll achieve, huh? What’s your endgame here, you fucking freak?” David’s eyes worriedly shifted to the group of kids not far away, both them and Gwen unaware of what was happening, too caught up in their games and child-corralling to notice him being threatened by a child. Max pressed the blade harder into his skin and pressed close to his face until Max was all he could see. “Fucking

answer me, damn it!”

David shook with fear, trembling. He closed his eyes so hard he saw stars, and started to pray to them he wasn't murdered by a ten-year-old on this summer day. “I-I just want you to be happy, Max,” he whimpers, looking into the child's face. The deathly light hasn't stopped glowing from deep in the pupils of the boy's eyes. “Y-You're always all a-alone. Everyone n-needs a friend,” he answers. The anger drains from Max's face, and a cold curiosity overtakes it. The blade of the boxcutter bites into his flesh, and David hisses between his teeth. “M-Max, please put it down. You're scaring me”.

“Huh,” Max whispers, seemingly to himself. The boxcutter is pulled away from David's neck, only to be replaced with a pair of small fingers. They press close to the shallow wound, and Max marvels at the blood on his fingers, the boy's mouth slightly parted.

David takes the boxcutter quickly from its fallen position on Max's lap. Max's hand snaps around David's wrist like a vice, but he doesn't look up from his bloodied fingers in an almost dream-like state. David whines like a scared dog, the leather of Max's glove holding fast around his wrist. “Max, please let me go,” David demands, a little more confident without a blade at his throat.

Max looks up, and with the dead light still burning deep in his eyes, he replies coolly, “Sure. Whatever you say, David,” and releases him.

David stands, and Max looks back down at his fingers, rubbing the blood between his finger and thumb. “Ask me next time you want to whittle,” he says, holding a hand against his neck, the bleeding slow already. “And do *not* threaten me again!” David turns on his heel and walks away from the boy a little faster than necessary.

If David had looked back, he would have seen Max stick his reddened fingers into his mouth.

Max is ten when David sees Max's hands for the first time.

Max had worn his leather gloves constantly and never took them off. Max was the last one in the shower and the first out, and always had the gloves on when he came out. David isn't sure what to make of it. He knew some people just liked a certain feeling or a sensation, and children especially fixated on this, but he never saw Max rub the leather like he enjoyed it, nor out of habit. They were

just always on his skin as if it were a part of it.

So when he sees them pulled off and a needle and thread in hand, David burns with questions at the sight of such tiny, scarred hands.

“What happened?” he asks as kindly as he can.

Max looks up at him with an almost startled expression, quickly replaced by cool indifference. He shifts in his seat like he’s uncomfortable. “Seam split. I need new ones,” he murmured.

It wasn’t what he was referring to, but he feels awkward bringing it up now. David gives a small, “Oh,” in response, and watches the tiny hands work the needle and thread.

“Quit staring,” Max snaps without looking up. “You freak. I can feel you looking at me”.

“Sorry,” David apologizes.

“You stare at me a lot,” Max says offhandedly, as though commenting on something incredibly dull. David recognized the incredible focus in his eyes though and knew he heard every breath he made. “You’re fucking scared of me,” the child almost growls, voice lowered. “Aren’t you?”

“No,” said David, but was that really true? He remembers the cold steel of the boxcutter against his throat and swallows. “I’m scared you may do something you regret,” he says gently.

“I don’t regret anything,” Max retorted.

David quirked his lips. “Nothing?”

“Fuck no,” Max says, straightening the gloves and snipping off excess string. “Waste of time”.

“That’s true! How insightful of you, Max!” he says brightly in return, ruffling the child’s hair.

Max froze under the touch, every muscle tight and stiff. “You’re a fucking moron,” he growls and slaps the hand away with his tiny scarred one. David smiles, but it weakens at the sight of the scars. Such a young child shouldn’t have scars like that. Not at that age. Max catches his eyes staring and frowns. “You’re staring again,” he says flatly. “They’re ugly, huh?”

David snaps from his stupor and feels himself blush in embarrassment. “N-No! They’re... How did you get them?” he asks, not knowing what to say.

Max slips the gloves back on, frowning. His eyes are still focused, gears turning and whirring in his head, a show David may never see or understand. “You saw me with the box cutter,” he says plainly. “I had to learn somehow”. Max pauses, and the cruel light in his eyes returns. He looks up into David’s eyes, the boy’s green orbs burning like the forest floor after a fire. “Sometimes I like to cut them on purpose,” he says quietly. The boy’s jaw grinds so fiercely that David fears he may crack a tooth. “It feels good. Do you think that makes me bad?” he asks.

David swallows, a strange fear rising in his throat again. “No,” he says, hands shaking as he pats Max’s gloved ones. “You aren’t bad, Max. But I’d like you not to hurt yourself, okay?” he pleads. Why is he pleading? He should be firm, stern like he usually is, but there’s something about the way Max moves and stares and the light in his eyes that flips some switch in his brain that makes him act differently.

“Why?” asks Max plainly. Anyone else might have mistaken it for a bored tone, but David could hear the faintest rise of Max’s hackles in his voice. A whisper of a box cutter against his throat again, though not physical, still a presence.

David swallowed thickly. “You’re hurting yourself,” he explains, tone tight. “It’s not healthy. What if something bad happened?”

Max smirked. “Aw, are you worried about me?” he replied nastily, eyes greedy and cruel, the light never fading from them.

“Yes,” David said without hesitation.

“Huh,” Max replied, blinking slow. “You’re stupider than I thought, then”.

Max is ten when he gives David a bracelet.

David looks out over the tables with pride. Friendship bracelet camp had been a great idea! Every kid liked to make them, and David usually amassed a few for himself from a couple of friendly campers. Gwen tapped away at her phone next to him, unenthused and clearly not paying attention. That's alright, he didn't mind watching them have fun.

David feels a tug on his shorts. He looks down to see Max, the boy's face a stiff frown. He shuffles and David recognizes it for the nervousness it is and finds himself smiling. Gwen looks up, raising a brow distrustfully. "Yes, Max? How can I help?" He asks kindly. The boy wordlessly held up his closed fist in a motion for David's own. David smiled and opened his hand below the boy's. "Do you have something for me?"

Max opens his hand, and a string of braided bracelet floss fell into his awaiting hand. David held it close to his face and squinted curiously before his head pulled back in surprise. What he had previously thought was a plain braided string of green and blue floss, was seemingly adorned with pale bone. The braided cord was strung through the center of tiny vertebrae, the white spine bones gleaming. "Holy shit, are those real?" asked Gwen incredulously next to him, leaning over.

"It's for *David*," Max snapped, glaring hard at the woman. His gaze broke away to stare into David's face, expression shifting seamlessly into a practiced, neutral frown.

"It's lovely, thank you!" he says, and Max gives the barest twitch of his lips. A spark of something calm and proud coats the boy's face. "How did you get these, may I ask?"

Max shrugs noncommittally. "Found it. Duh. I'm pretty fucking good at finding things," he says slyly, lip curling into a smirk.

David smiles and ties it to his wrist, Max's eyes tracing after the action greedily. "I have no doubt". He ruffles the child's hair fondly, and for once, he doesn't push the hand away. He just turns and walks back to the table, twisting a few more strands together and pulling another vertebra out of his pocket.

"Jesus, that kid is creepy," mumbles Gwen next to him, her eyes flicking to and from the child's face and her phone cautiously.

“Oh, don’t say that!” he whispers scoldingly. “I think he’s just a little lonely, and maybe has a rough foster home! He seems to be warming up to me, though”. He smiles, looking down at his new bracelet that has joined his watch on his wrist.

Gwen hummed, unconvinced. David continued to watch, glad that Max was no longer trying to threaten him and instead, was working his emotions out through the bracelet floss, even if the boy’s creations were a bit grotesque.

He had given up on keeping the boxcutter away from the boy. It seemed that no matter how he hid or locked away the thing, Max found it and David would spot the familiar hunter-orange handle poking out of the boys back pocket only a day later. Well, at least he wasn’t using it on himself or others anymore, as far as David could tell.

David asked to see Max’s hands every other day and didn’t find any new cuts, which he was pleased to know. Max offered his hands up almost shyly when David asked for them, setting them in David’s larger ones in a faux daring fashion

He admired his new bracelet. Perhaps there was hope after all.

Max is ten when David finds him tying knots in the woods.

He’s out for his after-dinner hike when he hears the faintest snapping noise in the woods. Curious, he turns about in place, resisting the urge to call out. It was most likely a deer or animal of some kind. The counselor found himself anxious at the thought. What if it was another raccoon? Two children already had to have rabies shots this year, and he didn’t have any money left in reserves for vaccinations. Perhaps it would be best if he followed the noise and scared the animal away. They were rather close to camp.

David followed the crunching noise as quietly as he could. Perhaps if he snuck up on them and gave them a shock, they wouldn’t come back. David smiled at the thought. Yes, that would work!

The crunching noise ceased suddenly. David frowned. Where could it have come from? David followed the direction of the noise as best as he could from memory and found himself staring through the brush at a familiar blue hoodie.

David felt his brows draw together at the sight of Max tying a knot in a small piece of rope. *Why would Max be tying rope so late in the day, in the middle of the forest?* Granted, they were rather close to camp, but still! Why?

Max pulled the looped knot away from his hands and pulled the rope, as though testing it. He nodded to himself, and tied it to a branch hanging from a bush nearby, and laid the rope down so the loop was on the ground.

David frowned. *Another trap?* David hadn't stumbled into any of Max's traps since they'd seemed to have formed a sort of truce. Not even a bucket of water onto the head (though Max had never done something as simple as that before). If that were even a real trap for him or one of the other campers, why would it be in the middle of the forest?

His question is answered a moment later when Max pulls a small, brown ball from his side and sets it on a nearby flat-topped stump. His heart falls into his stomach when he realizes that the ball is not, in fact, a ball, but a small, brown rabbit. It appears to be very dead if the lack of movement and traces of red around the mouth and neck are anything to go by.

The boy pulls the creature up by the ears, and pushes it flat on the stump, belly up. David places his hand over his mouth in horror and watches as Max pulls a familiar box cutter out of his pocket, flip the blade open, and use the elongated edge to slice open the animal's flesh.

Blood oozes out of the wound, but Max doesn't seem to care and focuses on the task with a strangely enamored expression. When the rabbit has a large slice from the throat to its naval, the boy uses his gloved fingers to pull the skin up and away from the flesh. David feels his stomach churn and closes his eyes a moment to gather himself. He forces his stomach to settle, afraid he may vomit if he doesn't pull himself together.

When he looks back up, Max has a bare hand deep in the rabbit's ribs, pulling organs out and squishing them curiously in his wet, red hand. The boy watches the ripe, brown-red liver squish between his fingers with a curious eye. David decides that this is the moment to step in.

"Max!" he calls, startling the boy so badly that his entire body jolts and turns his entire body, his eyes wide. "What on God's green earth are you doing?!" he asks loudly, voice abnormally high.

Max moves the box cutter down from its offensive position but gains his usual scowl. “What the fuck does it look like, jerk off?” he sneers back, gripping the cutter in wine red fingers, sticky and dirty with blood and brown fur.

“Why are you-” he swallows, feeling bile rise in his throat at the sight of the bloodstained stump and ripped open rabbit. “Why are you cutting that poor thing open?”

Max paused. “I don’t fucking know,” he shot back defensively, cheeks flushing in what David now knows as embarrassment and not anger like he’d once thought. “It just seemed like the thing to do! I just like it! Fuck off!”

“Max, that’s awful! You shouldn’t do that! And look, you’ve gotten all...” He trails off, feeling sick again at the sight of blood. “What if it had a disease? You could get sick touching it, especially blood!”

A small trickle of discomfort, almost fear, entered Max’s sneering face. “...Well why does it feel so fucking good if it’s so bad?” he snarks, though he wipes the blood on a little heavily used, dark brown-red washcloth he pulls from his backpack. He uses his gloved hand to push the bloody mess of animal off the stump and into a shady spot, where he kicks some leaves and twigs over the corpse. David thinks he hears him mumble “Coming back for you later,” under his breath, but can’t be sure.

“Because... Because it’s bad to hurt other things!”

“It’s just an animal, David,” Max grumbles walking back to the man and letting him fuss over the dirty boy, pulling leaves from his hair and using the washcloth to wipe the blood from him. “You eat meat too. Where the hell do you think it comes from?”

“That’s different! They aren’t being... being slaughtered by a ten-year-old boy in a forest with a boxcutter!” he shoots back, sounding every bit as upset as he was. How could he not have known his own camper was sneaking off to catch and kill animals? What was he *thinking*?

Max chuffs out a small laugh. “Whatever you say, Camp Man. Just let me take a hot fucking shower and I’ll listen to whatever stupid lies you tell yourself to feel better,” he replies and falls into a walk beside David.

David shakes with each step. What on earth had he gotten into when he decided to help Max? He looks down at the bloodstained boy, seemingly relaxed despite cutting open an animal not moments ago with an almost scientific curiosity, something he'd never encountered a child do before. Even in Animal Science Camp when they'd dissected frogs, he'd occasionally get a few kids who would cry at the sight of a dead animal, empathy flaring. It was a pitiful sight, but even barring those, he'd never seen a child excited for dissection, let alone trap and capture their own for their rest hour activity!

Something was wrong with Max, that he knew for a fact. Between threatening him with a boxcutter, to cutting animals up in the woods, he knew that there was something awful in Max's mind. He just hoped it wouldn't hurt the boy, or anyone else when Max figured out what it was.

Max is ten when he helps David hide a mistake.

He should have seen it coming.

Gwen always told him that he was too trusting, too kind to anyone that seemed a little strange or weird, too intent on not being a bully that he would throw himself into the fire before he realized it was hot.

Daniel had arrived in stainless white clothes and a stainless white smile, offering nothing but promises of fun and help. Gwen, surprisingly, had found herself overwhelmed by the blond and redhead working together seamlessly and decided to take a day to go to town.

David supposes that's how he ended up alone with the man, struggling against the plastic of a grocery bag suffocating him, with Daniel pushing him down.

"Stop making this harder than it has to be". Daniel gives a grin, though anger is clear in his eyes. His body moves fast and quick, and a plastic bag is pulled over David's head, suffocating him. David struggles, body heaving and twisting, trying desperately to squirm away from the cultist. He sees spots in his vision begin to form, his lungs screaming under the pressure. He pants against the damp bag. He struggles to hit the man behind him, but between his fading strength through suffocation and the whisper of a knife at his back, he finds his body slowing and weakening.

This is it, he thinks fearfully to himself, vision blurring and fading, his face wet. *I'm going to die.*

With his last ounce of strength, David stomps his heel into the instep of Daniel's heel. He feels the cultist loosen his hold on him and screech. A small amount of air bleeds into the bag, and it's enough for David to wrench himself out of the cultist's hold. He snaps his elbow back and drives it into Daniel's ribs, managing to twist just far enough to get a good angle.

The cultist stumbles back with a shout and slips, a sickening crack resounding in the room. A dull thump rings out as something heavy hits the floor.

David gasped for air, oxygen like the providence of God in his lungs as he tore the grocery bag off of his head. He sits himself up, breathing heavily. He cracks open an eye and immediately wishes he hadn't.

Daniel lay on the ground before him, his neck twisted into a strange angle, and his own ritual knife punctured his stomach. The very end of the twisted blade was visible just through his back, blood oozing from the wound and staining the sterile, white fabric of his shirt. A massive, wine-dark pool slowly grew from the center of his corpse.

David let out a quiet, strange noise somewhere between a whine and a half-choked scream. Tears poured from his eyes. God, what had he done? He hadn't meant for this. What was he going to do? He felt panic rise in his throat, suffocating him faster than any plastic bag ever could. Terror screamed in his mind like a siren, drowning his rational thought.

He heard a creak and gasped for breath.

Max stood over the bloody scene with his mouth slightly open. The child took in the scene with wide eyes, searching each piece of the crime scene. The green orbs finally made their way to look into David's own, and the counselor finally managed to find his voice, however quiet and rusted it may have been from almost choking to death. "M-Max, don't look!" he rasped desperately.

But Max did look.

Max seemed to look at the corpse of the now deceased Daniel with an almost amazed expression. David recognized the strange, deadly light that seemed to emanate from the boy's green eyes and finally found he could place the look, having seen the same light moments ago in pale blue eyes

that looked cruelly down on him while he suffocated.

“What the fuck did you do?” Max asked, voice breathless.

“M-Max, I s-s-swear, I didn’t- I didn’t mean-” David stuttered helplessly from the floor.

“He’s fucking dead,” Max said, tone almost gleeful. “Holy shit, David”.

“I know, I know, I know, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m so sorr-” David sobbed repeatedly as if saying so would change the world around him and make the action untrue.

“Shut up”. Max walks closer to the corpse. “Wow, his neck’s broke and everything,” he breathes, tone almost reverent. "That's a lot of fucking blood!"

David lets out a choked noise and struggles on the floor to stand. He falls repeatedly to the ground, tears flowing.

“Hurry up and stand. We’ve gotta hide him”. Max trots over to him and pulls him up by his shirt with young, gloved hands. “Come on, we’ve gotta hurry before Gwen gets back. Are you okay?”

David chokes, Max allowing himself to be used by the ginger counselor to pull himself up. God, what was he going to do about Gwen? What was he going to do about the *body*? “N-No, we have to call the police, they’ll know what to do”.

“No! David, don’t be a fucking moron, you killed him!” Max hisses from the floor, grasping tightly to David’s khakis. David lets out another distressed noise, and Max shushes him. “Shut up idiot, and listen to me! It’s fine! You’re fine, but you *need* to chill, alright?”

Everything’s fine, everything’s fine, everything’s fine, everything’s fine-

Everything is NOT fine, there is a dead body on the floor for god’s sake what are you going to do-

“Listen,” Max began, “I know a lot about this stuff okay, I read books on this shit. So, a lot of guys

keep from getting caught by chopping up the dead guys and burying them-

“Oh my god,” David sobs, his tears starting back up.

“I said shut up!” Max snaps, kicking his knee hard enough to only cause a slight discomfort.

“Listen, I bet if we cut him up and throw him in the incinerator then no one will even know he’s gone. Everybody’s off at the Field, no one’s going to come up here. All we gotta do is clean up, okay?” Max rushes to the door. “I’m going to go get the construction camp shit, just stay here and *don’t call the cops*, okay? If you do, they’re going to fucking take you to jail. Okay?”

David whimpers. He doesn’t want to go to jail, but surely they’d understand, it had been life or death-

“David, fucking answer me”.

David swallows. No, they might understand, but they also might *not*. This could go on his record. David could end up in jail. He may never work at a camp again. Max was right. He couldn’t risk this. He shakes his head. “No, I’ll get it. Y-You might get questioned”. He steels himself up. “I... just stay here, okay?”

Max watches him warily. “Alright. Hurry back”. Max snickers after a moment. “It’s not like *he’s* going anywhere,” he says with a sneer, looking down on the now dead man.

David swallows the bile in his throat. *Be strong, David.*

David rushes back in ten minutes later with two kinds of saws and a tub of cleaning supplies. Max takes the smaller hacksaw and almost excitedly starts sawing into the dead cultist’s elbow. “You have to cut at the joints,” Max explained as if he told David to get him coffee. “It’s easier”.

David stares down at the bloody body, unmoving and on his knees.

He swallows, looking at the wide blue eyes that had once been full of cruel light that looked down on him like he were a minor inconvenience. If Daniel hadn’t died here, how many more would he have killed? Oh god, would he have hurt the *kids*? What if Daniel had tried to kill the children? A kind of sickly determination filled his gut. He wished he hadn’t killed the man, but he couldn’t shake the sense of relief he felt that the blond corpse would no longer be able to hurt the children.

“Hey, David,” Max says, holding up a small slab of meat in one hand, and a bloody arm in the other. “Can I have this?” he asks, shaking the meat, flinging blood about. A dot of it landed on the boy’s cheek.

David’s lips curled back in disgust and he felt his stomach turn. “Why on *earth* would you want that?!” he whisper-yells.

Max shrugs. “I kinda wanna try it”.

“Try *what*? ”

“You know,” Max says. “Eat it”.

“Max, that’s disgusting! Why would you even ask that, that is a horrible thing to ask to do! No, you may not, oh my gosh!” David can feel his delicate constitution degrading under the question.

Max frowns. “Come on, when else am I going to be able to? Unless one of us kills someone else, it’s never going to happen again!”

“It never *will* happen again, I never want to do this again!” David wails suddenly, tears falling from his eyes suddenly.

Max’s eyes widened and he dropped the arm and the meat with a sickly thump, his leather-clad hands hesitantly dropping onto David’s shoulders. “Shit, sorry. David, it’s okay,” Max says in a whisper. “You need to be quiet”.

David hiccups and nods, swallowing tears. He gently pats the boy’s head with his hand and nudges him away carefully with trembling hands. He wipes his eyes on his shirt and pushes the body parts into the tub he had brought the items in. David picks the full tub up and resists vomiting only just so. “Let’s... Let’s just get this over with, okay?”

Max nods carefully, eyes flickering between the tub of bloody meat and cloth to David’s watery green eyes. He follows dutifully and almost with excitement to the basement, where the incinerator sat that David had seen Cameron Campbell slave over many times, burning his own

secrets before disappearing for many weeks, sometimes months.

He sets the tub down and lights the forge with shaking hands. He could hardly believe he was actually doing this. The severity of the situation hits him again as he picks pieces of the dead man up and pushes them into the fiery maw of the incinerator. Like a hungry beast, it devoured the corpse, flesh popping and sizzling as it burned down to ashes. The smell of cooking meat filled his nostrils and the raw scent killed his determination. "Wow..." marveled Max, throwing half a bloody leg into the fire. "It smells like regular fucking meat". David crumbled. He took a step back and felt his chest quake, his hand fisted in his bloody green shirt over his heart. "David...? You okay over there, dumbass?"

David shook his head, a dry sob escaping his throat. "I... I..."

Max came over in an instant, awkwardly shushing him and pulling him down. "Hey, hey, come on, idiot..." He pulls David to his knees. The counselor finds himself clinging to the young boy, shaking in every limb. Max pulls his arms back in surprise before greedily wrapping his arms around the older man, absorbing David's grief with almost gleeful appreciation. "It's going to be okay, David. I'm going to take care of you. I promise," he says with relish.

It shouldn't comfort David, the greedy proclamations of protection from a child, but he finds himself calming like a babe under Max's smaller, gloved hands. "I'm s-s-sorry. I should- should be stronger for you... H-How are you f-f-fairing, Max?"

Max seemed surprised at the question. "Me? I'm fine. You're the one losing it".

David snuffles and hugs the child close. "It was an accident," he murmurs. "I didn't- I didn't *mean* to- He-" he sobs again, trembling.

Max pulls David forward and kisses him.

David trembles with the force of it. Max clearly has no idea of kissing, likely never has. It's got too much teeth, it's too fierce, there's no trace of tongue or softness anywhere to be found in Max's mouth, and it leaves David shaking and weak. "Max," he sobs out. "Please stop". He shivers when Max bites carefully into his lip with precision with an inquiring hum. "I don't like this".

"What's wrong, Davey?" the boy whispers, a savage note to his tone. "Don't you like me anymore?" He laughs like the wind in winter, too cold, too biting. "Do you know why I'm not

freaking the fuck out?” David shakes his head. “Do you know why I’m in foster care?” David shakes his head a second time. He doesn’t think he wants to know. “Because my mom liked to drink too much. She used to make me make her fucking martinis”. Max laughs again, cruel and disgusted. “She had a heart problem, so she took meds for it. The police told me it’s because she took too much with too much alcohol, but do you know what *really* fucking happened, Davey?”

David shook his head, turning away. “M-Max...”

Max moves a hand to curl around David’s throat, the press of the warm, blood-slick leather biting and sharp despite the lack of physical edge it had. “I put more pills in her drink, David,” he purrs, leaning close. His thumb pushes against David’s pulse, quick and frightened. “And now, everything’s okay. That’s just the way it should be”.

David struggles against the grip. “Max, please”. He doesn’t know what he’s pleading for.

Max hums again and David’s stomach churns. “I like to hurt people David,” Max says honestly. He gives a small smirk, and yet, tightens the grip on his windpipe just enough to make him gasp. David grabs the arm with both hands, but can’t find the strength to pull it away. “I know I shouldn’t,” he pulls David closer with both hands against his neck, the redhead resisting slightly. “But it feels so *fucking* good”. He hungrily bites at David’s lips, and the older man sees stars, his vision blurring from tears, wind rushing through his neck, strained as it may be. It’s not tight enough to hurt or suffocate, but it’s just tight enough to make him work for his air.

“Max...” he croaks, and the pressure releases. David gasps and clutches at his throat. He feels bile rise in his esophagus but pushes it down, breathing heavily.

Max allows David a moment to collect himself. Then, he nudges David with his foot. “David,” he whispers into his ear. “Get up”.

David does not stand.

Max kicks his leg a little harder. “David. *Get up*”.

David stands robotically, still holding his throat.

Max looks him carefully in the face with a frown. “Come here,” he says.

David walks stiffly forward. Max tugs him into a slouch far enough down that he can hold David's face gently and tugs him forward for a soft kiss. It's a gentle, chaste press of lips to David's red abused ones and it leaves David shivering, but not complying. Max seems to take note and pulls back, looking David in the eyes with a small note of worry hidden deep in the green depths. "It's going to be okay," he says kindly, though nothing about this night has been kind. "How about you go clean the kitchen and I finish this, okay?"

David continues to stare at the floor but gives a slight nod.

Max smiles. "Good boy". The way Max says that shouldn't make David shiver with satisfaction. The boy takes David's hand in his gloved one and pulls him along out the door, and lets go.

David cleans the kitchen mechanically and soon Max comes back with clean gloves and his still stained hoodie in his hands. He asks for David's shirt, and David reluctantly pulls the stained fabric from his body, trying to ignore the feeling of Max's eyes trained on his chest. He crosses them when they are both thrown into the fire, Daniel's body cracked and black, the bones crumbling in the intense heat. Soon, they would only be ash and dust. The blue and green fabrics burn together in the fireplace.

When Gwen comes back before dinner, after both he and Max have showered (David insisted he stay to clean more in a bad excuse to stay away from Max) he asks her to cook, telling her that he isn't feeling well. She does the job with a little complaining, and David heads to bed without dinner. He walks past the Mess Hall and sees Max pick at his dinner carefully. Catching sight of David outside, he smirks and looks away.

David turns and hurries back to his cabin, changes clothes, crawls into bed, and begins to cry. He doesn't sleep. He hits the off button on his alarm the moment it goes off and gets out of bed to get ready for a new day in a robotic fashion.

Max is ten when he and David go into town.

It's still dirty, he can still see the stain.

Visually, he can't see the stain under the soap and his constant scrubbing, but in his head, he can still see the dark red. He can still see the streaks of red in the wood, he *knows* it's there, just past the filter of the future.

"David. David, it's clean".

It's not. It's red, it's stained, he can see it right there. Can she see it? He hopes no one sees it. He hopes everyone sees it so he knows he's not crazy.

"It's still dirty, I can see the stains, Gwen". He scrubs harder and feels his hands crack under the chemicals. He should have worn gloves. *Leather gloves on his hand, leather gloves on his neck, leather gloves on his cheeks and a small tongue on his lips, leather gloves, leather gloves, leather gloves-*

"Holy shit David, are you crying?!" David feels a hand on his back and flinches at the touch. He looks up at Gwen's worried face and finds that yes, his cheeks are wet with tears. Suddenly, he finds himself bursting into sobs and clings to Gwen desperately. "Oh my god, David!" she cries as she wraps her arms around him, moving to her knees to hold him, gently rubbing his back to soothe the distressed man.

David bawls into her shoulder unabashedly letting go of himself. "I-I-I'm s-s-so sorry! I d-d-don't know w-w-what's w-wrong w-with me," he sobs, the release of emotions through his tears a relief he didn't know existed.

"Oh, David," she murmurs, patting his back. When David pulls away to wipe his tears and try to pull himself together, she gently lays a hand on his shoulder. "Why don't you take the day off? You're pushing yourself. I don't need a psychology degree to see that," she says with a small, encouraging smile.

David wrings his hands. "A-are you sure? I don't- I don't want to be dead weight or anything..." he says, trailing off. When was the last time he'd had a day off anyway? It had been so long, he couldn't even remember. What did people even do on their days off?

Gwen shrugs and pushes him away from the scrubbed spot. "Don't worry about it. I've got everything. Just... go relax. Okay?"

David nods. "Okay... yeah, okay. Thank you, Gwen," he says with a quivering smile. Maybe this

was a good idea. He hadn't left the camp since before... David swallowed.

David was just heading to the car when he heard a yell of his name. He froze and turned, finding Max trotting up just behind him with a new, unstained blue hoodie. "Where the fuck are you going?" he snapped, heat distinctly gone from his voice.

Gwen huffed next to him in annoyance. "Leave him alone, Max. He's taking the day off".

Max's eyes snapped to David's, and David found himself offering a nervous smile. "Why? Are you okay?" the boy asked, concern in his eyes veiled behind an indifferent expression.

David found his heartstrings twisting at the knowledge that the boy was concerned for him. "It's alright, Max. I just... need a break". He pats the boy's head, and Max smacked his hand away. "I'm just going to town".

"Cool, I'm coming too," Max replied, pushing past the counselors.

Gwen hooked her fingers into the hood of the hoodie, and Max swung his head around with a glare. "Sorry kid," she said, face stern, clearly immune to the child's fiery glare. David shivered. She wouldn't be if she'd seen them both the night before. "David needs to relax. He can't do that with a kid running around, never mind a kid that will push him around".

Max snatches his hoodie back from the older woman's fingers. David sees the growing fire in the gaze and steps in, nervously sweating. "Actually, I think that's a good idea, Gwen".

Both Max and Gwen's eyes snapped to him in surprise. "Uh, David, are you sure?"

"Y-Yeah, it's fine! I don't mind, I... I think it's a good idea. I think we both need a day out of here". David smiled at the boy nervously, the memory of the boy's hand on his neck and his lips on his prickled at the back of his brain. David sighed. "Come on, we'll be back soon".

David could feel Gwen's eyes burning holes in the two of them with curiosity. David and Max wordlessly got into the car. The counselor swallowed nervously, turning the car on, but not moving. "Max put your seatbelt on".

Max frowned. "I don't fucking like the way it feels on my neck," he protested.

David's hands shook on the wheel. "Max, just... move your hoodie to cover it, okay?" He bit his lip, eyes not breaking from the road in front of them.

Max stared him down. He almost thought the boy would protest again, but instead, wordlessly buckled it. "So," Max began, as soon as they began driving, "You're cracking, huh?"

David chokes. "W-What?"

"Are you going to the cops?" the boy reiterated.

David shook his head.

"But you *are* cracking, aren't you?" the boy pressed.

David grit his teeth. "I... I can't stop thinking about it". He spared the boy a glance, and immediately regret it. The piercing green eyes that dug into him like claws were completely focused on him. He looked away quickly. "I'm surprised you're faring better than I am," he admitted.

"I told you," Max sneered. "I've been through this before".

David swallowed. That was true. "Do you... ever regret it?"

"No," said Max loftily. "Never".

"Oh," David replied, voice small.

They drove in silence for a moment. "What... happened before I came in there?" Max asked, voice suddenly quiet. "What did he do to you?"

Plastic in his mouth, stretching around his teeth, burning his lungs, he couldn't breathe, the whisper of a knife struggling to get a good, clean cut against his throat, cruel blue eyes staring down with dead, dead light burning deep in them-

David shuddered and had to pull to the side of the road a moment to gather himself.

“David?” Max asked a second time, voice lowering in demand. “What did he do?”

“I... He tried to kill me,” he chokes out, throat dry. “He was- he tried to suffocate me with a bag and s-stab me...” David leans over the wheel, shaking.

He feels a smaller hand on his knee, the familiar leather making him jump. He looks up with wide, scared eyes into calm, green ones. “I should’ve known you wouldn’t feel like me,” Max mumbles. “You’re too goddamn soft to feel good about hurting anybody”.

“That’s the thing,” David says, his tone quaking in fear. “I don’t”.

Max’s eyes seemed to dilate. “Oh”.

“I- I didn’t mean to kill him! But what if- what if he was going to hurt any of- the kids! What if he tried to kill any of you kids?!” he almost talks to himself. “It’s like I’m- But it’s still so-” Tears pool in his eyes in frustration and distress. “I don’t want to hurt anyone!” he wails. “I just want everyone to be safe! I just want everything to be okay! I just want to be good!”

Max is silent through David’s pleas. “David,” he suddenly says. “David look at me”. He hears the seatbelt unlock with a click. He looks up from the wheel and a pair of leather-clad hands take his cheeks in his hands. The young boy presses a chaste kiss to David’s lips. David freezes, the entire situation like a dream like if he moved his hand to Max’s neck it might tear through as if made of tissue paper. His hand presses to the back of the boy’s neck and twists his fingers in the fine, baby soft hairs of his neck. Max hums against his mouth, and he’s struck suddenly by how *young* Max is; to have kissed someone so improperly, to help David hide his bloody mistake, to have killed and made his own before David had. He’s so young. Too young.

David pulls away as if stung. “Max... Max we- *I can’t*,” he whispers. He’s done so much damage already. He doesn’t want to do anything more. He doesn’t want to hurt Max, as much as he doubts he could.

Max frowns, eyes flashing the awful light that was usually buried far from anyone to see. “If you’re worried about fucking me up,” Max sneers, fisting his hand in David’s shirt, “You’re about a year too late for that”. He grins bitterly. “Maybe even ten”.

“Max...” he says, gently untangling Max’s fingers from his shirt.

Max sighs. “I know. You don’t- You aren’t like that... are you?” he says wistfully. “It’s because I’m a fucking kid, isn’t it?”

“That... yes, that is certainly a big part of it”. The sting of the box cutter against his throat isn’t a memory he’s soon to forget.

“I’m going to come back here,” Max says with sudden determination. “When I’m bigger and older, and then I’ll take care of you”. He stares into David’s eyes, the boy’s green ones alight with fire. “You won’t have to hurt anyone if you don’t want to, because I’ll fucking do it *for* you. Then, you won’t have to feel bad. I’ll kiss you so good you won’t ever fucking push me away again. I’ll do it,” he says, expression dark and intent on David’s own. “I’ll keep you safe and kill anyone that tries to hurt you. I’ll be bad so you don’t have to. That’s a fucking promise”.

David shakes with the weight of the words, and shakes just as much the day that Max’s foster parents come to pick the boy up.

He shakes when Max fists his gloved hands in his shorts and presses his face into David’s stomach. Max shakes too, then. He whispers his promise again in David’s ear with determination, and David shakes still when Max is gone moments later. The only remnants that Max had been there at all being the press of the bone bracelet against his wrist, the faintest feeling of leather against his skin, and the memory David held of the boy named Max that shared his darkest secret.

Chapter Summary

Same place, different time.

Chapter Notes

I bet everyone thought I forgot about this. Nope! It's just really fucking long and I didn't always feel like writing it! Sorry I took so long, but you know how it is when you move. Sorry if you liked the old format, but i decided to forgo it this time. just didnt mesh well with how my style has changed. :P Anyways, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

David is sweeping up the kitchen when he is startled by a voice from the doorway.

“Damn. Seeing you clean the floor in here again sure brings back memories, huh?”

David looks up with a slight jump. A scruffy young man in a dark blue jacket with the hood pulled over his head enters through the doorway, dripping with water from the rain outside. He pulls his hood down and ruffles curly, damp hair. The man certainly seemed familiar, but David couldn't quite put his finger on it. “I'm sorry, do we know each other?” he asks politely, despite the man's vulgar language.

The young man seemed amused at his response, and pushed his hair back to reveal piercings in his brow. “What, you fucking forgot about me already? Rude as shit, David. It may have been a while, but I still remember when we cleaned the blood off the floor together”.

The final piece of the puzzle clicked into place. David froze in place and the broom in his hand dropped to the floor with a clatter he didn't hear. “Max?!” he whispered.

Max grinned, green eyes bright and excited. “Miss me? Sure sounded like you forgot all about me for a minute there”.

“I... My goodness, how you've grown! I didn't even recognize you!” he exclaimed hastily

picking the broom up and leaning it on a picnic table. He rushes over to his former camper. "You're so tall now!"

"Ha, yeah. I always hoped I'd catch up, but it looks like this is fucking it," he says with a shrug, the cheeky grin still on his face. "Damn, did you grow a beard?" The young man's fingers found their way to David's cheeks, still gloved. Different ones, obviously, but David still shivers with the familiar feel of leather against his cheeks.

"Not that I'm not glad to see you, but what are you doing here?" David exclaims, pushing the curious fingers away from his face, still dizzy from the realization. "It's been so long... You must be..." David trails off a moment, ticking his fingers. "Sixteen now? What are you doing back?"

Max nods, amused. "Yeah. Yeah, I work here now. Campbell hired me after a phone interview," he says with a smirk and drops his hand to his jacket pockets.

"Part time?!" David exclaimed.

"Full time," Max corrected. "I got emancipated a little while ago so I could quit getting shuffled around by the goddamn system. I'm a counselor now, can you fucking believe that?"

"It's-" David begins, before memories he's tried so hard to repress churn to the surface.

"I'm going to come back here," Max says with sudden determination. "When I'm bigger and older, and then I'll take care of you". He stares into David's eyes, the boy's green ones alight with fire. "You won't have to hurt anyone if you don't want to, because I'll fucking do it for you. Then, you won't have to feel bad. I'll kiss you so good you won't ever fucking push me away again. I'll do it," he says, expression dark and intent on David's own. "I'll keep you safe and kill anyone that tries to hurt you. I'll be bad so you don't have to. That's a fucking promise".

David swallows. Did Max even remember the promise he'd made to David so many years ago? He obviously remembered David's... situation. "It's... It's good to see you, Max," he says softly; and it's the truth too. There's a certain pride in his chest that burns with the knowledge that he took part in shaping Max into the tough, seemingly capable young man he is now. He grins playfully and pokes Max's broad shoulder. "And what is this?!" he teases. "Did Weight Camp pay off after all?"

"Oh, fuck you!" Max shoots back with a snort. "Weight Camp had nothing to do with this!" Max

ruffles his hair. “How else was I supposed to take care of your ass?”

David’s blood ran cold and he froze in place with a nervous grin still on his face.

Max’s eyes glinted. “Come on, *Davey*, ” he practically growled, voice dipping low. Max advanced on David, and he took a reflexive step back until he hit the registration table. “You didn’t think I’d forget about what I *really* came here for, did you?” Why does it feel like Max is managing to loom over him when he’s shorter than himself? “The pay is shitty, and so is the boarding. I came here for *you* ”.

David trembles. “M-Max, I’m your- I’m so much older than you-” David excuses anxiously, sweating. Max’s face grows hard and scowls. He glares possessively, and David has never felt smaller when Max slams his hands on either side of David on the table. He hears a pencil fall off. “Don’t you th- Y-You should be with people your own age-”

“I don’t *want* someone my *own age*, ” Max snaps, inches from David’s face. He can’t seem to tear his eyes away from the awful glow of Max’s green ones. “I want *you* . You’re already *mine* ”.

“Max-” David protests.

“Don’t you fucking dare try to tell me you’re not,” Max snaps. *His foul language certainly hasn’t matured*, David thinks dizzily. “You never stopped me. You never told me you didn’t like me. Fuck, you hardly even tried to convince me otherwise”. He stares greedily into David.

David shivers. Max was right, but David always felt as though he wasn’t sure of anything when it came to Max.

“Face it, asshole,” Max says, leaning back and giving David some room. He releases a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. “I may have been gone for six years but I still know you better than everyone else. Did you ever tell anyone else your dirty little secret, Camp Man?”

David’s can’t find his voice, and ends up shaking his head wordlessly, still a bit breathless.

Max laughs. “Good. Figures, if you’re still here”. Max backs off further. “You’re maybe the most stubborn idiot I’ve ever met, but you know what?” Max’s eyes are hard and heated, like molten gemstones. “I waited six fucking years, I can wait a summer too”.

David can't find anything to report about to Campbell to get Max fired.

He does his work, albeit when no one is looking. David wouldn't have known they were done at all if he wasn't checking, he does everything so pristinely. He just seems to be relaxing constantly, but even then, he still kept an eye on the kids.

The kids. Another thing.

Max didn't seem to want to hurt any of them.

Where Max had been violent before with outbursts of rage to put a volcano to shame, this Max just seemed mildly irate at best. He rarely shouted at the kids and even then it was the harmless type of shout from him. Heck, he hadn't even gone to the woods to trap animals, as far as David knew.

Still, David stayed on Max, watching for anything wrong he might do. Even further, a question burned in his mind.

Had Max killed anyone else since he'd been gone?

David knew the teen had killed his mother. He knew that Max had seen David's mistake, and helped clean up. But had he killed anyone else in that time?

Looking at Max, relaxed on the sand and with an amused smirk on his face as a camper buried his feet in the sand, David couldn't help but think that maybe not. Maybe Max hadn't killed since his childhood and had left his past behind him, as David had.

But thinking of Max's eyes when he'd seen Daniel's corpse, the possessive snarl when he'd confessed to him, the slight curiosity in his voice when he'd asked to save a piece of meat to swallow later... David couldn't help but think *maybe*. *Just maybe*.

"Max? Can I ask you something?" David asks, hot water scalding him.

The shower next to him poured as well, and he saw Max's tan feet turn. "Yeah?"

David swallowed and distracted himself with lathering his shampoo. "Have you- Have you killed anyone? Since- Since the first time?"

Max is quiet, then sighs. The sound of cleaning commences once more. "*No*, David. I haven't," he says, sounding somehow disappointed.

David swallows but smiles and rubs the shampoo into his scalp. "Good! That- That's good! I'm proud of you".

Max sighs next to him. "David, I don't really care".

David's heart plummets. "Oh".

Max sighs a second time. "Look, I just feel like you're getting your fucking image of me misconstrued. I'm not better than I was back then. I'm not really much worse either. I'm still the kid that killed his mom, and helped you hide a body. It's just now I'm willing to do shit like take care of the kids and do laundry, and I know how to pay bills. You can't fucking praise me for not killing someone," he explains, expression tired and irate again.

David finds himself stunned, hands still in his hair. He doesn't really know what to say to that.

"David," Max says quietly, above the spray. "I like you a lot, okay? And I know you like me. I've seen you look at me, and you've been watching me like a fucking hawk for *weeks* now, and I get it, okay? I get that you're worried or whatever, but I'm not planning anything other than winning you over by the end of the summer".

That makes David flush, and the heated spray of water has nothing to do with it. “W-Winning me over? I’m not a prize, Max”. He frowns, a bit irritated at being almost compared to a sticker for a job well done.

Max is quiet a moment. He growls, shutting off the water in his shower. “You fucking know that’s not what I mean. Do you have any idea what you mean to me? You’re the only one that never made me feel like a fucking freak”.

Moments later, his own curtain opens and he squeaks in surprise. Max advances, lips curled, hair clinging to his forehead from the water. It looked so different from his usual fluffed and curly bed head that he didn’t care to brush. He advances slowly, hands on either side of him the second David feels his back hit the wall. His breath hitches and he tries to pin his eyes to the small blemish on the wall past Max.

“You always made me feel normal,” he snaps, face inches from his own. “Do you know what I did before coming here? I went to therapy. *Therapy*, David!”

David curls inwards at the words, hands trying to cover himself shamefully. “Th- That’s great news, but would you mind moving back a little?”

“David, I went through fucking *months* of that shit, and I know I’m a huge asshole that killed someone, but I really do like you, and you telling me off for everything I do really isn’t helping me and honestly feels kind of unfair”.

“Y-You’re *fine* , I just don’t feel comfortable with you trying to lure me into some kind of- into telling you I’m attracted to you!” he finishes awkwardly. “Can you please leave? This is so inappropriate, I’m not even dressed-”

Max’s lips curl into a smirk. “Yeah, you aren’t comfortable saying it out loud, but you fucking do. You like me, asshole,” he growls. “You couldn’t survive without me. It’s a miracle you made it this long, really”.

David can feel himself sweat under the hot spray of the shower and the increasing heat. “Max, please-” He can’t tell what he’s pleading for. For him to leave? For space? For Max to move closer? His eyes have pulled away from the wall behind to Max’s own green orbs. They flick rapidly to and from the wall, Max’s eyes, his bare clavicle, dusky brown nipples that are stiff behind chest hair- *the wall the wall the wall-*

Max pulls a hand around David's hand that wasn't covering himself and brought it down to cup Max's cock, half hard and silky with water. David's hand is stiff, as if it were made of rusted hinges that couldn't move or work. His mind was equally frozen, caught in a loop of panic and wanting to keep his hand there.

Max moves closer, leaning on his elbow and pressing his chest flush to David's, moaning softly in his ear. "Mmm, you see what you do to me? You fucking asshole. You can't lie me, idiot". Max gasps, his half hard cock pressed to David's thigh. He doesn't move himself or David, just allows his half hard cock to be warmed by his hot thigh. "Fuck, you're so goddamn amazing, do you know that? You do so much fucking work for these kids and you *love* it- Fuck! You love me, I *know* you do, just fucking *say it*". Max is panting hard with his hand wrapped around their cocks, every part of the teen twitching. His lips press to the juncture of David's shoulder and neck, soft and restrained despite the ferocity of the words.

David whines, turning his head to the side. He's not sure if it's to be away from Max or to allow for easier access. *He could kill you right now*, he thought to himself dizzily. *He could just open his mouth and snap his teeth around your neck and rip out an artery and that would be it. You'd die, naked in a shower stall with your neck in Max's mouth and his hand around your cocks.*

He shakes and gasps, hand snapping from covering his privates to shield his mouth with the back of it, afraid of the whines escaping. Max's lips open to his teeth, sinking gently into his neck as if he'd read David's mind. He gasps under the touch, tongue soothing the slight nip.

Truth be told, he hadn't expected this level of softness from someone like Max, who was a hard look and sharp words, fuelled with piss and vinegar like no one would believe. The hand around his was firm but forgiving, only a loose accessory now. David's other hand curled around the teen's arousal of its own accord, loose with hesitation.

"Come on," Max's growls giving way to a whine. "You're so soft and perfect. I used to- Mmm- It used to annoy the fuck out of me how pretty and perfect you are, but now I just *love it*". He presses closer, thigh between his own legs and pressing to him. "Come on, just say it. I'll never hurt you. I'll never let anyone hurt you. I'll take care of you just right, I'll make sure you don't have to take more than you can or want. Just say it, god, please, I need to hear it". David flinches, realizing he's gone hard. He feels shameful, he feels hurt, he's scared and anxious and he feels-

He feels strangely safe.

Max could have killed him by now if he wanted to. He could have pushed himself further onto him, could have forced David to do horrible things, could twist everything around on him, and yet he didn't seem to want to; and as much as he hated to admit it, Max made him want to be stronger. Max didn't take anyone's bull and certainly never fell through. There was a resilience to him that

David knew was unique. On the other hand, he had also killed someone.

With Max whispering soft praise in his ear, he decides no one is perfect.

His lip quivers. "I could get in so much trouble for this, Max," David whispers, tone desperate.

Max grins wide and triumphant, leaning close. When he talks, David can feel his breath on his slightly parted lips. He smells like apple shampoo and smoke. "Well," he says, "Who's going to say anything?"

Max slams the door to the mess hall open, a painful smile split wide on his face. David felt his heart drop into his stomach. "What's happening? What's wrong?" he asks hurriedly, voice low when Max comes close.

Max's grin widens painfully and he can see the fiery hate in his eyes. His voice seethes deadly from between grit teeth like a poisonous gas leak in an elderly woman's home. "Look behind me and all your questions will be answered".

David does as instructed with curiosity rising. It bursts in his chest with happiness at the sight of a familiar face. "Mr. Campbell!" he cheers, pushing Max out of the doorway at the sight of the camp's owner. "Wh- What are you doing here?! Aren't you supposed to be-"

"In Thailand, as the Prime Minister?" Mr. Campbell interrupts, a glowing smile on his face as he grinned down at David. He pats David's shoulders good-naturedly and gives a booming laugh. "Funny story about that, I'm sure you're going to laugh when you hear it, but I actually don't have much time to chat right now, Davey! My work never ends, naturally!"

David nods. "Of course! I understand," he consols, not understanding at all. Mr. Campbell was always working so hard, and David often tried not to learn what he did. He had a feeling he might not understand it. Maybe Mr. Campbell would have time for camp activities later when he was done?

"I knew you'd get it," he says, ruffling the counselor's hair. "I trust you've been keeping Mick and the kids in line while I've been gone?"

"It's Max," Max interjects from behind him faintly. His voice was far but extremely irate with the barest hint of venom slipping from the facade.

"What did I say?" Mr. Campbell continued, sounding genuinely confused with his usually genial tone.

"Of course! Max has been a great help!" he boasts, purposefully not going into too much detail like he usually did. It wouldn't do to tell his boss that he was... fraternizing with someone so much younger. He gulped, guilt eating him inside like fire ants.

"That's great!" the owner of the camp cheers distractedly. "Now, I'm going to go to the attic for many hours at a time, and I may not come out for a while! Do we have any empty bottles? The bathroom is very far, and I'm not the fastest runner".

Oh. It was going to be one of those visits. David holds back his disheartened sigh and puts on a brave face. "Alright! Um, the bottles are in the kitchen... Is- Do you want me to say anything if anyone comes by?"

"Just the usual!" Mr. Campbell says, pulling the stairs to the attic down and tucking milk and juice bottles under his arm. "Goodnight, Davey! Goodnight, Mike!"

"It's Max!" Max corrects, grin shaking like a leaf in a storm.

"Actually, my name's Cameron!" says Mr. Campbell, pulling the stairs up and closing the door with a thump.

David sighs and continues cleaning up from dinner, a bit disheartened that Campbell wasn't here for a simple visit. Those had been occurring less and less over the years, and now they had vanished all together. He supposes he'd better get used to it so he would stop being so disappointed, but he couldn't help but hope.

"God, why do you stick your neck out for that jackass?" Max grumbles, drawing closer and sitting down at the window stool as David wiped the counter. "He treats you like shit. Did you see how he was pissing on you?"

"Max! Don't talk like that! Mr. Campbell is very generous to let us work here!" David scolds, but his heart isn't in it. He doesn't bother to correct Max's language. He's suddenly hit with complete exhaustion as he drops the last used table wipe into the trash.

"For what?! Making us work with shitty pay?! It's barely minimum wage David! And he's such a dick to you! Why do you-"

"Max," David interrupts suddenly, the bags under his eyes weighing more and more with each of Max's words, "Can we save it for the morning? I'm really tired".

Max pauses and looks at David. His furious persona completely halts and he gives a blank look. "Are you okay?" he asks, tone empty.

David nods, moving past Max. Max follows him out wordlessly, oddly quiet.

When they get to the counselor's cabin, they both pull their pajamas on in silence. David falls into bed, momentarily irate that he can't fall asleep instantly. His eyes flood with tears against his will. He lets them overflow and fall to his pillow, the sound the barest *plip, plip, plip* in the otherwise silent room. He can feel Max listening. He can't hold back a snuffle.

At the noise, he hears Max shift and he knows he's heard him. "David?"

David doesn't say anything. Maybe if he's completely silent, he won't say something wrong. Maybe if he stays in bed tomorrow he won't ruin anything else.

Max sighs and David hears the ruffling of a sleeping bag, followed by the pad of Max's feet against the dirty, scuffed wood floor of the cabin. He sees a Max-shape appear over him. "David,

are you good?" he whispers above him.

David nods.

Max is quiet a moment. He catches the barest bit of moonlight from the window on his face. His expression is oddly concerned and curious. "Are you lying to me?"

David snuffles again against his will. David nods shamefully.

"...Do you want me to sleep with you?"

David freezes. If Campbell were to know- Campbell wouldn't know, who would tell him? Certainly not Max, and David wasn't particularly inclined to tell. Campbell wouldn't ask because of one truth that David wasn't and maybe would never be ready to admit to himself: Campbell didn't care. Campbell didn't care what David did or said or acted out (even if it were illegal). So long as he did what he said, Campbell didn't care, and David couldn't bear the thought that he spent so much of his life trying to be noticed by someone he admired only to be compartmentalized by them into a too small part of their mind that held no affection.

Was this how Max had felt?

Max . He was still waiting for an answer. Rather patiently too. David nodded shamefully. He didn't want to be alone right now. "Can-" David's voice cracks as Max begins to slip in between David's sheets. He pauses at David's words. "Can we not talk?" he pleads.

"Ok," Max agrees, finishing his task. He slides up close to David and lets the older man tuck his face into his neck as if to hide from himself.

He shouldn't be doing this. Max is sixteen. He's a kid. Even if he *had* wanted to have- Even if he wanted David like *that* he likely wasn't interested in bearing David's thoughts and guilts. Though now that he thought about it, it likely wasn't anything nearly as bad as killing his mother. *Max hadn't regretted that though*, he reasoned. He said he-

He was distracting himself and it wasn't working. His tears had leaked into Max's night shirt. "S-Sorry," he cried quietly into his neck.

“You shouldn’t cry over him”. Max pressed his lips to the top of David’s head in an oddly soft manner. “He’s not fucking worth it”.

David doesn’t say anything. He knows. He knows.

“We’ll talk in the morning,” Max decides. David nods into his chest, eyelids dropping. He sleeps dreamlessly.

David woke up with a headache.

He wasn’t surprised. That usually happened when he fell asleep crying. He sighs, unusually irritated at the thought of waking up. He startled when he realizes something warm stroking up and down his chest. David’s eyes cracked open and was greeted with the sight of Max resting his cheek on David’s shoulder, where David’s arm had unconsciously wrapped around him.

David paused, watching the air wisp from between Max’s slightly parted lips. He looked so peaceful like this. His cheeks were still round and soft with youth. He was still so young. It was easy to forget that he was the angry, pissed off kid that stabbed him with a sharpened plastic knife the first time they’d met. Or the kid that threatened him with a box cutter.

David frowned to himself. Max did look rather adorable curled against him, hand rubbing his chest and breathing soft. Not for the first time, conflict rose in his chest. Max had wanted this. He’d been the one to pin him to a wall. It wasn’t *David’s* fault. But he was still the adult. He had to take responsibility.

“Shut up,” Max grunted in his ear.

David startles. “I didn’t say anything?”

“I can hear you thinking. Shut up”. Max nuzzles closer to him, hooking a leg over David’s hips. Max’s lips press to his neck, chapped lips rubbing against David’s scruff. Max hums. “You’re getting a little scruffy there, babe”. His tongue traces his jaw.

David shivers, oddly relaxed. It made him anxious. “I’ll shave it when we get up,” he replies.

“You could always grow it out,” Max replies, lazily kissing his neck. “It’s kinda hot”.

David blinks looking down. “Do you think so?” He wasn’t sure how he felt about that. Has anyone ever called him hot? He doesn’t think anyone ever has. It’s nice to be appreciated.

“Mm-hm,” he confirms.

“Huh,” he says, staring at the wooden ceiling. “Max, do you really think I’m... I don’t know, some kind of idiot?”

Max falters against him, lips pressed to his neck. “The hell brought this on?” He asks, pulling away. He rolls his body over David’s hips, sitting upright on them. The comforter fell halfway off his shoulder, the morning sun lighting him red and orange. Max’s hands run up his chest as he leans down against him. “Is it him?”

David bites his lip, face flushing. “Am I?”

Max sighs. “Yeah”.

Okay, that hurt. “Wow, thanks,” he sulks.

Max frowns. “You’re an optimist. It’s basically the same thing”. Max sighs. “Besides, it’s not your fault”.

“It’s not my fault I’m an idiot? Wow, that makes me feel so much better! Thanks, Max!” David

shoots back.

“Damn, when did you learn how to be sassy?” Max says with a laugh, body rocking next to him.

“I’m doing this wrong, aren’t I? You’re not stupid, and it’s not your fault Campbell treats you like you are”.

David closes his eyes. He doesn’t know where he went wrong. Maybe it was when he burned a child-murdering cultist’s body in the incinerator he uses to burn bills. That might have been a turning point.

Max flexes his fists. “Can I tell you something?”

David perks. “Yeah, of course! What is it?”

“You know how I... haven’t killed anyone?” he tries.

“Yes?” David says slowly.

Max sits up, the blanket falling from his bare chest. “Okay, so I know killing is obviously *bad* and you don’t want me to do it,” Max reasons. “Look, I just want to come clean with you, alright?”

David narrows his eyes suspiciously. “Why? The Max I know would never come clean about anything unless it was to mess with my head”. He raises his hands at the cocked eyebrow. “Don’t get me wrong! Loving this communication we are having right now!” he reassures quickly.

Max smirks. “Aw, you remember my quirks,” he coos condescendingly. “Normally you’d be right about that shit, but also this is relevant”. Max breathes deep. “I want to kill Campbell”.

David’s mind screeches to a halt. If a bomb went off he wouldn’t have been able to hear it. “You want to *what?!* ”

“I know I said I don’t really give a shit about killing people, and I stand by that!” Max assures with a sigh. “But also, Campbell is a major asshole that treats you like shit! And you’re my boyfriend

now, so I kinda have to look out for your stupid ass because you sure as hell aren't!" he grumbles.

David stands, running his fingers through his hair. "I cannot believe you are considering this! It's- Killing is *bad*, Max!"

Max pulls an irritated face. "Oh, fuck you. My mom? Seriously awful person. She had an eight year old make her martinis. Campbell? Only slightly better, but also maybe worse? He did have those child labor lawsuits back in 2002," he replies thoughtfully. "And that child slave thing that when down when he was in Taiwan. I'm just now realizing he owns a summer camp and has all these child related lawsuits..." he ponders thoughtfully.

David winces. He remembers those. "Look, it's just- We're boyfriends?" he stops cold.

Max's face blanks. "Y- yeah?"

"Oh".

Max frowns. "You thought I was lying? What, you think I'd just pin anyone to the wall in a bathroom like that?"

David whines. "Ohhh, please don't be offended!"

"David, you can't just say 'don't be offended' when you say something offensive! It's still offensive!" Max rolls out of the bed and walks to his side of the cabin and begins to change.

David adverts his eyes. "I just don't want anyone dead, Max!" he shouts. He grabs a pillow and places it over his face, screaming into it. He comes up for air and glances at Max, who pulls his hoodie on. "Look, I... You're right, I like you".

Max pauses, jeans halfway up his thighs. He looks up at David, green eyes melted from their usually crystallized and frozen look. "Really?"

"Yes! You're- you're amazing! You're passionate, and funny, and you look so cute when you sleep!"

Max wrinkles his nose sarcastically. “You watched me sleep? That’s not creepy”.

“You killed your mom, Max”.

“Yeah, but I didn’t watch her sleep, I just filled her glass with extra heart medication”.

David sighs loudly. “My *point* is that I do like you, but we’re on thin ice as it is! You’re- Max, you’re so much younger than me, so us being close is already suspicious and I’m not completely comfortable with this anyways, so I just feel like killing someone is going to make me blow a circuit, okay?”

“...And it’s also bad and wrong, or something like that maybe?” Max suggests.

“Exactly! See, you’re getting it!” David cheers him on, pulling a tank top over his head with a frown with a sigh. “I can’t believe I’m out of uniforms,” he complains.

“Oh good. You’re done complaining about me,” Max snarks.

“Hey!” David says with a pointed finger. “Not complaining. *Worried* . I... I could seriously hurt you, Max”. David didn’t want to think about how much he might have hurt Max already. It was his fault in the first place, he should have been smart and just pushed Max away when he was still young. Maybe then Max wouldn’t have this obsession with him, and David would have an easier time pretending he didn’t have one for the teen as well.

Max sighs. “You can’t”.

“I *could*. Max, I-” David swallows. “I don’t want to be the bad guy in your story, Max. I don’t want to hurt you or for you to-” *Leave*. “-To get hurt. That’s all. Worried. You deserve a second chance and I- I’m screwing it all up”. David swallows. Nothing he’s going to say is going to make Max better, and he knows it. Maybe Max wanted to change at one point, and he’s glad to have inspired it of course, but not like this. It made his gut boil in shame and guilt, gnawing at his insides like ravenous wolves.

Max’s eyes fall empty and cold. “I didn’t ask for a second chance,” he states, tone cold. David’s

heart turns to ice.

David swallows, sweat forming on his brow. “I’m just telling you how I feel”.

And just like that, Max’s frozen and icy demeanor shifts into something warm. He walks forward, wrapping his arms around his waist. Green jewels of eyes stared into his with a familiar intensity that didn’t completely thaw. “Well stop worrying about me. You’ve got better shit to do”. Max’s hands rove to his arms, squeezing the thick muscles there with a greedy smirk. “Like lifting things in front of me”. Max lifts the arm and pulls it around his shoulder, kissing from David’s lips to his shoulder, nipping at the tender skin at the inside of his arm. David gasps, muscles flexing, forcing a moan from his young boyfriend. “*Heavy things,*” he elaborates, tone lowering.

David chuckles but there’s something hollow to it. “W- Weight Camp?” he inquires nervously.

“Oh yeah,” he agrees, pressing his lips to David’s unshaved cheek.

“Promise not to kill Mr. Campbell?” he pleads, hugging Max closer, wincing as teeth dig into his neck. He wriggles nervously, heat rising to his gut when teeth scrape at his pulse. “Please? For me?”

Max pauses and pulls away with a small smirk, straightening David’s tank top. “What you think I’m just going to do whatever you say if say ‘Please, for me?’ at the end of it since I’m your boyfriend now?”

Worth a shot. “Please? For me?” he pleads, pouting.

Max laughs and nuzzles under his chin, wrapping his arms around him in a tender hug. “Ugh, fine”.

They both barely lasted the week. David thought it would be easy enough to separate them, but Campbell seemed to have business between the summer home and constantly shifted between the two places. The constant tension of Max's rising fire between David's anxiety rubbing against each other was almost too much. One of the kids had gotten a hold of some firecrackers (god knows from where) and lit one in the activities feild, and all of David's limbs had locked in place like a gazelle under a lion's paw. He'd frozen into an unblinking statue until one of the kids bumped him and forced a scream from his lungs, leaving him shaking.

Max wouldn't leave him alone for a second. Worst of all, Mr. Campbell had given him a list of things to do and clean up to cover his tracks. He'd been so caught up in the tasks, he hadn't even noticed he'd taken the last of his pills until he went for an empty bottle and ended up having to leave for town for a while.

Max was silent for all of the times he helped clean up Campbell's tracks, but he could see the seething rage that rose in his eyes and in his spine, cold and much too deadly for someone so young. David swallowed, watching Max closely through the week. He knew there was some part of Max that was big and hungry, wild-eyed and angry. It was like a massive monster made of all the nothingness in the world, something that was all sharp angles and straight lines that hated with the heat and pressure of the center of the universe. A hole shaped like a silhouette that was never full. David wasn't sure if that was what drew him to Max in the first place, or if he had his own hole inside him too.

He knew he'd been attracted to Max when he was young. The boy had been gone long enough for him to accept it and hide it in a deep part of him that hid everything else. He should have stayed in bed that day with Daniel. He should have stayed in bed so he didn't fuck Max's entire life over, should have let the cultist stab him through the heart, cut his head off and pour poisoned fruit punch over the bleeding stump of his neck so he'd never hurt anyone ever again.

But that wasn't quite true was it? David couldn't help the heat in the back of his mind when he thought about Daniel all those years ago getting burned into dust. When he'd found his own ashy footprints in the bathroom the next day. He was glad he'd killed him, even if it was an accident. He was glad he killed him and as much as he hated to admit it, he was glad that Max had latched to him, because just as Max had a hole inside him that probably began the day his hand slipped over his mother's martini, so too did he find a hole inside himself the day they burned Daniel. Maybe he'd always had it inside him and just didn't know what he was looking at, or maybe it grew over time from a pinprick to a yawning cavern. All he knows is that it cracked wide open when David told Cameron Campbell that FBI agents were poking around the camp.

Cameron shouted and cursed, pushing papers off the desk in the attic. David flinched but kept the wide grin on his face. Too wide to pass, he knew. "I told them they should come back in a few months and maybe you'd be here, but I didn't know where you'd gon-"

His voice was cut off by a slap. It happened so quickly he almost couldn't process the blooming pain on his cheek. Campbell's voice was muffled in his ears like he were listening to him through aquarium walls. His breath moved stiff and even in his lungs even as his head was a cacophony of sounds. Campbell was talking slower now, softer. But he didn't hear anything in his voice. All David could feel was *holes, holes, holes*. Holes deep in his brain where something never was, holes in his soul where memories dripped into nothingness, dissolved to vapor, holes in his throat, holes in his voice.

David opened his eyes, and where Cameron C. Campbell was standing, all he saw was another hole.

But this one he could fill up.

"Do you understand me, Davey?"

David smiled, and it was a hole in his face. "Of course sir. I'm sorry".

Campbell smiled genially, brushing his hair back into its charming curl. "Of course you're forgiven Davey. I'm sorry as well, but, well, I'm under a lot of stress".

'Sorry but,' isn't an apology, he thinks to himself even as he agrees, walking back down the stairs.

David remembers reading science books in his room for a school project when he was younger, and one thing always stuck out to him. Something like 99% of the universe was made of this inscrutable energy called dark matter, and no one knew what it was. So much of the universe, almost all of it, was occupied by this big massive something that lived between atoms and suns and inside everything and *no one knows what it is*. David supposes that's understandable. Sometimes things just can't be known.

Sometimes because there was nothing there at all.

When he returns to the shared cabin with his hand on his face he finds Max already laying in David's bed reading. The teen drops his book to the sheets the second he sees the ginger walk in. "David! David, look, okay I got to be honest with you, I-"

"You were right".

Max stops. "What? David are you okay?"

"You were right about him".

Max's eyes narrow and he can hear it in his voice what he's thinking. "What did he do to you?" His tone is deadly, and David can hear all the awful love inside the man light up. He can hear every nerve and synapse fire and spark just to make whoever hurt him suffer, and for once, David welcomes the warmth it gives him. He hasn't the courage or will to deny it this time.

"I'm okay. But you were right". David smiles but he feels tears pour over and down his cheeks, silky and cool like a strip of silk lace. He laughs but it's more like a hiccup. He doesn't feel much like laughing, but he doesn't know what to do. "Max," he pleads, voice quivering. "Max, what's wrong with me?"

"*Nothing.* There's nothing wrong with you!" Max assures, trembling with him, his arms around him. David tucks his head down and he hates how much he needs and wants Max with him. "It's him, it's all him! You're a good person, David".

"I'm not," David sobs, hands wrapping around the teen desperately, his facade cracking at the foundation. He howls into Max's hoodie, muffling the noises. "I'm not, I'm not, I'm not, I'm not," he continues, dissolving into barely audible bubbles of words.

"Yes you are," Max says gently, far gentler than anyone like Max had any right to be to anyone like David. "Tell me what's wrong".

David swallows. "Why do I want him gone?" he cries, face buried in his shoulder.

Max freezes next to him. “Oh David,” he whispers breathily. “I can definitely do that”. Max pulls him up and kisses him. It’s like having air in his lungs for the first time ever.

It’s quiet a moment aside for David’s sobs when Max suddenly crumbles all at once in his arms and they fall to the floor, holding each other.

“I wish you’d killed me then,” Max says, slouching to the floor. It’s enough to shake David further into tears at the sight of someone as strong as Max falling with him. “You should have fucked me, gotten it out of your system, and then bashed my brains in so I could be in the ground already. I’m not even supposed to exist! *She* told me she was heading to the abortion clinic when she found out it was closing down. I’m sorry I fucked you up- I never understood how hurting you didn’t make me feel good like hurting everyone else did,” Max pants with each quaking breath. “So I hurt you some more. And I kept fucking hurting you because I was pissed and didn’t understand. But I get it now. I *like* you, David. You’re something *really special* and I’m so fucking sorry-”

“It’s not your fault!” he protests, wiping his tears with a wince at Max’s words. “I was so bad even back then- I didn’t want to admit it but I- I did like you back then, and that was so *bad* and it’s still *so bad*- ” David cries again wiping his face. “I’m sorry, I’m such a mess”.

“You’re not a mess, you’re my- you’re my boyfriend and I- I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else with anyone else”. David’s mouth is dry at the admission. “Max-” David whispers, slowly shifting to look Max in the eyes as he wipes his own. Max has already offhandedly brushed his own tears away, the only evidence he’d been crying being the red rings around his eyes. “I- Let’s do it. Let’s do your plan”.

Max’s eyes widen. “What?” he whispers, barely audible. It was more a motion of lips than anything.

David nods, hoping the hole inside him isn’t entirely swallowing him up. “Let’s kill Mr. Campbell”.

David frowns at his guitar case. His hand holds the last of his guitar strings. He fumbles open his desk drawer, shoving flashlights, batteries, and takeout menus out of the way.

Drat. Nothing.

“David? Are you ready?” Max asks, opening the door. David looks back with an anxious smile and nods. The teen struts up close to him and wraps his arms around his waist, nuzzling into his back. “Nervous?”

“Terrified,” David admits.

Max smiles. “That's okay. I was scared my first time too,” he admits.

David looks down. “Do you know where my other strings went? I'm out of E strings”.

Max frowns. “Probably one of the kids. You know they don't like your songs”.

David frowns sadly. It's a good distraction for a moment from what they're about to do. “I... Is this... is everything going to be okay?”

Max sighs. “David, I'm not going to lie. He- Look, I don't know if this is going to make you happy. Killing mom felt good, but after that, I just went back to feeling normal. When I think about it, I do feel good but,” Max sighs, hugging him around the waist from behind. “It's not going to last forever, but today? Today is going to be a *really* good fucking day”. As he says these words, Max's hands dip lower.

The kids are gone, the Quartermaster taking them to the library for reading camp (Campbell's stores of books were limited at best, and David felt no guilt over changing the schedule). He can barely believe he's about to do this.

David squirms around to face Max, pulling his hands from around him to hold them in his own. “Um, maybe we can wait until after?” he asks in a small voice.

Max's eyes gleam, and he feels him slip something cold into the back of his pants that isn't his

hand. “Absolutely. You know what to do right? You remember the plan?”

The metal weight is heavy behind him. “Yes”.

Max smiles, straightening David’s uniform. He’s suddenly reminded of all the scenes in movies where the housewife straightens her breadwinner husband’s tie before he leaves through the door for work and nearly laughs aloud. “What?” Max asks with an amused expression, stirring him from his thoughts. “What’s with the weird look? You’re looking at me like a fuckin moron”.

David shakes his head, smiling slightly. Then he drops it and sighs, shoulders lowering. “Max, how am I going to do this?”

Max’s smile drops as well. “Don’t even think about it. It’s easier if you get really, really mad, you know? You have every right to be. It’s easier if you’re angry. Then, you just do it. Don’t even give him a second thought. He’s not worth it, okay?” He straightens David’s vest one last time, though it’s already smooth and ironed flat from the night before. “It’s easy, David. It’s so easy”. His voice is reverent as he leans up, the air whispering over David’s chapped lips. “It’s so easy. Like stepping on a slug”.

“But I like slugs”.

Max laughs and brushes his lips shyly to David’s. “Well, pretend this slug is an asshole and won’t be missed”.

Then he kisses him.

Max doesn’t kiss him much. David was always a little like a baby antelope when it came to their relationship, startling away from anything he didn’t understand or feel quite right about, but right now? Right now, this is something that makes David feel perfect.

People like to talk about how there’s this one thing that just completed them. That made all their hard work, and their suffering, and their blood, sweat, and tears worth it. Some said it was getting their dream job, or holding their first born child, but most said it was when they found the person they loved and their loved was returned. David had always believed in that, until he met Max.

Max never believed in anything so pretty. Max didn’t believe in pretty things, and meeting Max

did make him realize something.

Things don't complete people. Neither do people complete people. Happiness, no matter how good, is still temporary because life is just a series of ups and downs. Meeting Max didn't complete him, though it did fill a few holes inside himself. When they wake up tomorrow in the same bed, they'll go back to being Max and David the camp counselors, just like Max said. But today? This kiss? It's making David feel the kind of unstoppably spectacular that you only dream of getting even a fingerprint of.

Max pulls away and the moment is gone, but there's going to be more. David has a lifetime of them left. Max smiles dreamily. "Fuck, I love you," he whispers. "Let's do this shit".

David can't wait.

"Mr. Campbell, sir?" David says, voice strained in tone. They're in the Mess Hall. For a moment, David can almost see Daniel standing in the kitchen, head cracked open where he'd fallen with purple punch drooling from his grinning mouth. He swallows, shaking. The metal weight feels heavy under his shirt behind him. *This is a good day. This is a good day.*

"Yes, my boy?" asks Mr. Campbell offhandedly, not particularly listening.

Look at me, he wants to say. He's irritated. He's fourteen years irritated. *Look at me when I'm talking to you.* Instead however, he says something he hadn't planned.

"I don't want to work for you anymore".

Mr. Campbell stops immediately, frozen a moment. Then, he turns with a small smile, eyes crinkling at the edge where he has crow's feet. His eyes are hard. "What do you mean?" he asks calmly.

David swallows, summoning his courage. He can hear Max in his head for just a moment, whispering in his ear. *It's easier if you get really, really mad, you know. It's so much easier.*

Looking at Campbell now, even as he stares at David with something like veiled hatred, he can't find himself to be angry. Deep in his bones, as stupid as it may be, David feels like he deserves it, for what he and his boyfriend have planned.

"I said that I don't want to work for you anymore".

Campbell stares a moment and then laughs. "Oh, I see what this is about! The camp! Right? Davey, you my boy, can run the camp all you like! I'll of course leave you the camp vault, but I'd like you to keep the name really, and some ownership... Do you mind if I get back to business now, kiddo?"

For just a moment, he feels annoyance. He's serious. Why isn't he taking David seriously? Is it *really* too much to ask that he talk to him like a real person for once in his life? "I *said*," David repeats, teeth gritting, pulling the hand pistol from his pants, "That I *Don't*".

It's easier if you're angry.

"Want".

Don't even think about it.

"To work".

He's not even worth the thought.

"For you".

Now's the time. Do it.

“Any. More”.

David’s raised hands trembled on the gun.

“What are you doing with that, Davey?” Mr. Campbell asked. His voice was light, toned with the honey he always had when he spoke to David. “You should put that down! Someone could get hurt!” he says jovially.

David felt something in his heart crack. The sweetness in the words fell over his ears and, for the first time, David listened and heard something he'd been ignoring in Cameron Campbell’s voice: a hollow emptiness. David had always listened to the sugar he'd had spooned into his ears by his boss and had never listened beyond. Heard sweetness, and made the mistake of thinking it for something kinder and better, but now David heard the hollow ring in the voice and knew the truth.

There was nothing there.

There never was, and there never would be.

David tearfully pulls the trigger, the machine giving a faint click as the hammer snaps down to the chamber. Everything is frozen, Campbell staring with wide eyes.

It was empty.

Cameron Campbell let out an easy breath and grinned triumphantly. David looked down at the gun in stunned confusion. This wasn’t supposed to happen. This wasn’t the plan. What-? “God, that was- Wow”. David looks up, eyes wide. Then, he sees him. “You really had me going there Dav-”

Suddenly, he is cut off by strand of something silver looping around his neck and a thin red line appearing, Campbell’s large hands flying to his neck in surprise. A boot kicks into Cameron Campbell’s leg and he falls to the floor. Max has the axe that David likes to use to split firewood, raising it with wild eyes and a big grin. He brings it down to Campbell’s shoulder, hacking through the meat and bone. Campbell’s arm half severed dangles by only a strand of flesh, twitching.

“I bet you thought you’d die in cuffs, huh?” Max growls darkly above the man, grinning wide and

calculated, tightening the wire. “Guess we don’t even need them now, huh?”

David is standing, breathless and watching. He’s never seen Max like this. He’s terrible, unstoppable. Beautiful in a way that David could never have thought was possible, in every way that is wrong, and yet somehow looking as gorgeous as an angel. A terrible, holy creature. The most perfect predator that had ever been created, and David watches him the same way that humans once watched wolves and were glad that they had their own.

Campbell suddenly bucks backwards, head cracking against Max’s hip, and Max is yowling, face twisted and angry. The deadly light flares in his eyes. He falls, Campbell seething and pulling the wire from his throat with his free hand. He stumbles, managing to pull out a knife from his belt, and falls onto Max. Max manages to catch the hand, Campbell screaming wordlessly and using his bleeding arm to almost hold himself straight. Max is struggling, reaching for the dropped axe, far, too far to grasp and manages a gasp of, “David”. When David looks into Max’s eyes, he doesn’t see the deathly light. He doesn’t see Max’s anger.

Max looks scared.

And David? For the first time ever, David is honestly and truly *angry*.

It’s almost like he blinks. One second, he was frozen in his spot, Max terrified and his own mind silent. The next, he feels hands on his shoulders and realizes, blinking and looking down, that the axe is in his hands. Further down the axe, Campbell’s torso is a mess, bloody and broken like something massive had chewed him up and torn him like a stick of strawberry gum.

He remembers with blurry memory and violently red vision that Max is right. It is easy when you’re angry. It was easy cutting Campbell down, taking the axe, pulling him off Max, pushing him to the wood and slamming the blade into his back. It was so horrifyingly easy to bring the axe down again and again when the man he’d looked up to, worked for, laughed next to, lived for, for almost his entire life was screaming for his own. It was easy watching blood well up and flesh become cleaved and a face he knew well slowly become an unrecognizable pile of red slurry. It was easy. David was angry.

David didn’t care.

“David? David, it’s over”.

And then there's Max, behind him with his hands on his chest. His face is pressed into David's back, tugging and pulling him back. Max turns him around, the axe falling from his slickened fingers. David blinks and looks down to Max.

Max is watching David like he was a god come to earth. He's marveling, eyes wide and so full of love, wonder, and something warm and full that makes David want it for the rest of his life. He's looking at David like he's the only thing that matters, like he's the only thing that will ever hold any kind of importance in Max's life.

David starts to shake.

"David?" Max asks slowly, startled from his reverence over the ginger.

"Why was it empty?" David asks, voice a dry whisper in his throat.

"I didn't want you to do anything you would feel bad about," Max admits. "Even if you could, I didn't want you to fucking have to. I'd be okay, I've done it before, but I thought this would fuck you up inside. You're too good a person. You'd feel bad about it".

David breathes. "He was going to hurt you".

"Yeah," Max agrees. He draws David closer and David lets him.

"He was going to hurt you," he whispers to himself, grasping at Max's uniform.

"Yeah," Max agrees a second time.

"I don't feel bad about that. Is that bad? I'm... I'm bad now, right?"

Max shakes his head under his chin. "You only got like that to help me, baby. You didn't have to, but you aren't bad".

"I was so scared, Max," he whispers.

“I know. So was I,” he murmurs, a bloody hand curled up at the nape of his neck. “Are you still scared?”

David was still shaking, but found the honest answer rolling off his tongue hesitantly. “No”.

He felt Max’s arms tighten around him. “I’ll take care of you, Davey,” he he whispers into his ear, pulling him close. “It’s okay. It’s all okay”.

David is still shaking. Why is he shaking? He feels *good*. For the first time in a very long time, David feels very, very good, and for the first time, David moves to kiss Max. His boyfriend makes a noise of surprise and something falls to the floor. A sticky hand moves into his hair, David suddenly aware of how much blood there is. His eyes open slightly, spotting a splatter on Max’s cheek, his eyes closed peacefully. Max smiles, and David smiles back, their lips touching.

All of David is thrumming with energy, adrenaline pumping through him from what he’d done. Campbell was gone. Campbell was *gone*, and Max was here and he wasn’t leaving. He felt electricity in his veins, burning and thrumming through him. “Max,” he whispers, hands roving to the teen’s shirt, wet palms sliding up and under the fabric to feel the soft skin there.

Max’s breath catches in his throat before breaking into a grin against David’s lips and giggling. His head tilts back, David moving forward. It’s like his body isn’t his own, almost dizzy with excitement. “Oh David,” Max murmurs, a small moan sounding when David presses soft kisses to the bit of his neck that doesn’t have blood smeared along it. Max’s knuckles tighten and he pulls on David’s hair a bit, lighting nerves and forcing a trembling moan from his own lips as he backs Max up against a table, painting slick, red handprints against Max’s stomach. “Oh fuck, Davey, please-”

“I’m sorry,” David gasps, pulling away. His palm already misses the skin it had tasted. “Fuck, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t-”

Max pushes himself up and sits on the table, pulling David closer, eyes lit with fire. “God damn it, David! I want you! Just fucking...” Max grunts, arching, curling his legs around David’s hips as he pulls his bloodied shirt from his torso and renting leather gloves from his fingers. David gasps, lightning bolting down his back at the stiff tent in Max’s pants and realizes he has one of his own. Dear god. If hell exists, he’s headed there quick.

Max is grappling for him now and he can see the bloody handprints he’d left moments before,

almost dried. He's gorgeous, and the sudden memory of how holy he'd looked just moments before when he'd had Campbell by the throat with an axe stirs him. There's scars, starting with the familiar ones on his fingers and hands to the less familiar ones that go up his wrists and arms. He can't help but take Max's fingers in his hand and press his lips to the old cuts on his fingers, slowly moving up the wrist. Max sighs, taking David's scruffy cheek in his hand. "I'm sorry," Max murmurs, watching. "Sorry I took so long to find you. I promise I tried".

"You're here now," David mutters against the skin, his other hand moving with hesitant excitement to Max's hips. He hears Max's breath halt with elation. "I... I missed you".

"I missed you too," Max breathes, pushing forward and wrapping his arms around David's chest. His hands slowly pushed his vest off, followed by David's shirt soon after. "This is ok, right?" Max asks quietly.

"As long as it's okay with you," David says back. He's not scared anymore, his body thrumming with elation and energy. "Have... Have you ever...?"

"No," Max denies. "I just wanted you. Every time I thought about practicing to be good for you when I found you, I... It never happened. I just wanted you more," he growls, fingers moving to his uniform khaki's pockets and pulls out a small cylinder. "Do you want to know," Max pants in his ear, using his other clean hand to unbutton his pants. He pushes David's hand to them and has the ginger pull them down and off, revealing luxurious lace underwear. "How many times I thought about this?"

David's breath catches as Max thrusts his crotch against him, the bulge in the silky fabric seeming all the larger in the tiny slip of lace. He's losing track of his hands, red and wet up to the elbow and painting marks along the clean body. Max was prepared for a mess, and was pristine before David's messy hands began to marr him. "Max-

"I used to stick my fingers in me and pretended it was you," he moans as David's hands turn bruising on his thighs that wrap the ginger's waist. "I used to close my eyes and pretend you were watching me. Do you want to watch me now?" he asks, uncapping the cylinder and squirting clear liquid onto his fingers.

"Yes," David breathes, mouth dry with want as he watches Max slick his scarred fingers, pulling the silk to the side, around his fingers and cock. He's tantalizingly soft looking, pretty and perfect. He's gotten muscular; David can feel it in his legs as he holds him in place, see it in the way his stomach twitches with stimulation. "Please, I'm- I can't, my hands are-

Max moans and it dries any words David might have tried, draining them from his mouth as he watches Max slip a finger into himself. He shouldn't be watching, shouldn't even be in this position. These sorts of things are sort of null now, the scales in David's head tipped differently. He's already committed a much more grievous crime anyhow. What's a little more lawbreaking? Especially when it's with Max, who moans his name so nicely and asks, vulgar and needy for him. "Oh David," Max sighs. "I can't wait. I- Oh god- I want you so bad".

David licks his lips, leaning down to press a kiss to his lips. One of Max's hands comes up and wraps in his hair, thighs working to push David's pants down. "What else did you think about?" he whispers against Max's lips, moving to the tender neck. He can taste blood there, a copper tasting mark of what they've done.

He feels powerful like this. He's about to have Max on a table not a few feet from where the remains of his boss are. His booted foot was still in a bit of him, if the odd slick sound was anything to go by. He wants to never stop feeling this good, wants to always feel the kind of exuberance that he feels when he's like this with Max.

Max moans loudly. And for a moment David is worried until he remembers that there's no one here. No one will be back for a long time. They can be loud. They can be messy like David's never been allowed to. "Oh fuck, I- Mmm, I thought about riding you. I didn't- ah!" he breaks off, David's scruff catching against the sensitive skin of his neck and he curiously bites at his neck with gentle precision. His moans go up in pitch when he moves up, just below the teen's ear to suck at the skin under his jaw. A sweet spot. Max has a sweet spot. He thinks he's going to die as Max's hand works himself open, trembling and excited, moaning louder and higher with each nip he gives. "I didn't t-think you'd be so- so involved. You're- You're fucking gorgeous. You looked so goddamn fucking beautiful when you got the axe- *oh god, fuck!* "

David pulls off, watching as Max slips his fingers from himself. The teen is panting, blinking dizzily as he watches David swallow and pull his pants down to reveal his briefs. "Max? Is this-?"

"God, just fuck me," Max interrupts, turning to his side and hooking a leg over David's blood soaked shoulder.

His hand instinctively comes to the muscular thigh and he swallows. "I didn't- I don't have a condom," he says weakly, mouth watering at the thought of Max allowing him inside and letting himself be prone before someone as weak as he.

"Don't need one, don't want one. I'm clean, and I know damn well you are," Max says.

“Bold assumption,” he says a little offended, but still pulling his briefs down.

“It’s not. I saw your test results. You’re not subtle with your mail, you know”.

Oh. Oops. “Sorry?”

Max rolls his hips, David losing his breath with the movement. “You will be if you don’t fucking hurry,” he growls, lowering a slicked hand to David’s hard cock. He gasps, the scars of his hands rubbing strangely against his cock. Max growls, pressing David at his slickened hole. “Please. David please, I don’t want to wait anymore”.

David bends, pushing closer to Max and taking one of Max’s clean hands in his bloody ones and begins to press in. “Tell me to stop if you need to,” he whispers, pushing in slowly. The second that David pushes past the tight ring of muscle, all the air seems to leave Max. He falls back to the table with a moan, writhing a moment before falling supine and languid with a soft smile on his face.

David is once again struck by the angelic look. Max is beautiful, littered in bloody handprints made by David, strung out and glorious and for the first time ever, David finds that Max looks truly *blissful*. There’s a satisfaction that seems to be soul-deep in him when David moves at a bruising pace, Max’s hand coming to his own hair and knotting. He laughs between moans delightedly and cries David’s name with reverence like he’s Max’s god. When his hips quicken, Max only moans louder. When his blood slick hand moves to stroke the teen’s cock between them, Max arches perfectly.

“David,” Max murmurs, sun pouring through the window and lighting Max’s skin. It’s as beautiful outside as it is inside. It lights Max’s hair and bloody skin with gold, lighting the blood ruby. “David, more,” he pleads.

David bends over the boy, holding more tightly the leg over his shoulder. “I love you,” David whispers, a breath from Max’s ear. He quickens himself, moaning at the slide of himself inside the teen. He’s so much softer than he’d thought a boy with metaphorical barbed wire for a tongue would be.

His hips work harder, and Max tips his head back with a grin. “Yesss,” he hisses out with delight. “Oh god, *David*, ” he cries. “David, I love you-”

“I’m going to- Max, I-” David stumbles on his words, can hardly speak with how Max suddenly tightens on him. When he makes to pull out, Max suddenly wraps his other leg around him, pressing David close, his hand pushing to David’s hair and yanking. The pain spikes and suddenly he’s spending himself inside of Max, rushing harder than he’d meant to. Max screams, David’s hand working furiously on the boy as white mingles with red on his hand.

Finally, David manages to slow. Max’s hands come up to his face, rubbing his cheek with his thumb. “That was definitely worth waiting six years for,” Max mumbles, pulling him close to press a kiss to David’s lips.

He blinks, suddenly hyper-aware of himself. Oh god. He hadn’t meant to be so rough! “Are you okay?! Oh gosh, I was- I didn’t mean to be so rough with you! Oh, it was your first time, I- I hadn’t meant to be so-”

Max moves a hand over David’s mouth. “Shut up. I came harder than I ever have in my entire fucking existence”.

David makes a noise behind the hand that’s a bit apologetic.

Max falls backwards, sun pouring in from the open window, giving his hair a golden hue. He stretches prettily, smiling to himself and running his fingers down his body as David slowly slips out with a moan, biting his lip as he watches through half-lidded eyes. “You’re a mess, babe”.

David grimaces, looking at his hands, still a bit tacky with the amount of blood there. “Yeah, sorry, I-” He bites his lip. “I-”

Max shushes him, pulling himself up and close to the older man, pressing a gentle kiss to the side of his mouth. “It’s okay. It’s all okay now. He can’t hurt us anymore”. Then, he’s putting David back inside his pants and buttoning them closed. He pulls his own forgotten pants up as well and then begins to nudge David to the door. “I’ll clean up here, you just go clean yourself up, okay?” he says with a cheerful grin. David opens his mouth to protest, but Max just gives him a stern look and he’s not quite prepared to argue when a sudden, deep rooted exhaustion hits him.

David lopes with even steps to the shower house and watches the remnants of his boss drain down the pipes. He watches his hands as they slowly fade from deep crimson, to pink, and finally to the pale skin of his hands. He’d done it. He’d actually done it.

He stays in the water until he can finally muster the will to go. When he leaves, he eyes his shaving gear. Max's mention replays in his head as he runs a hand down the scruff of his sideburns.

You could always grow it out. It's kinda hot.

Well, maybe he wouldn't get rid of *all* of it.

When David comes back, the Mess Hall is actually clean, save for the weapons, which Max has left in the sink. He's tying the guitar string into a loop at the table, still without a shirt when David comes behind him and presses a kiss to the back of the boy's neck. His gloves are on again, and there's a small, wrapped parcel on the table next to his hands. "Hey," he says with a smile, Max turning to return it. He's never seen Max smile so much before.

"Hey. Decided to keep it?" he says in return, eyeing the newly trimmed beard

"Yeah. Someone said it made me hot," he teases, pressing a kiss to the teen's nose.

Max snorts in amusement, pushing his face away playfully as David laughs. Then, the boy nods to the package. "Got you something".

"It's not my birthday!" David says cheerfully, taking it in hand.

Max chuckles. "I just thought you'd like a commemoration".

David tears the brown paper, revealing a pair of brown leather gloves, exactly like Max's. "I know you don't have scars, but you seem the type to like when couples have matching shit, so... yeah. Trapped, tanned, and sewn, all by yours truly," he says proudly. "Do you like them?"

“They’re wonderful. Thank you,” he says honestly, though he feels a little bad for whatever animal (animals?) that Max had trapped for these. He slips them on, and they fit perfectly. They’re supple, soft on his skin as he pulls the straps tight.

Max kisses him. “We can make this work,” he whispers. David nods in agreement. “Let’s stay like this here”.

“Let’s stay,” David agrees.

Hours later when the Quartermaster comes back with the kids, David is organizing plug-in stovetop burners for cooking camp. “New gloves, huh?” he grunts.

“Max made them for me!” he says cheerfully, admiring them. “Aren’t they good?”

“Very good,” he agrees.

As Max walks by with a wink, David thinks things are going to be very good from now on.

Chapter End Notes

tell me what you thought! worth the wait? glad with the ending? wanted it to go a different way? :)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!